



## **Details of the procedure of selective thinking**

### ***Stage I: Recollections (anussati)***

Reflect on:

- (1) Buddha – who became perfect in purity of mind
- (2) Dhamma – the technique of purification
- (3) Sangha – the followers of the way of purification
- (4) Oneself – who begins the way.

We begin by cultivating good thoughts:

- (1) Awareness of the realities of life

- (2) Dispassion
- (3) Compassion
- (4) Happiness
- (5) Tranquility

In-sight into impersonality.

At first, we consider these states of mind in **concrete** form as attributes of **THE BUDDHA**. Next we reflect on the nature of these attributes in **abstract** form as **DHAMMA**. Next we consider these attributes in **practical** form as present in the **SANGHA**, in variable degrees. They are also present to some extent within **ONESELF** as beginner.

## **Recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*)**

When reflecting on the BUDDHA, we should think of his attributes: dispassion (*virāga*), compassion (*mettā*, *karunā*, happiness (*muditā*), and introspective tranquility (*upekkhā*), because he depicts these attributes in perfect concrete form.

### **Dispassion**

Though born in a royal family in the lap of luxury, and destined to become a Righteous Global Emperor (*cakkavatti rāja*) according to soothsayers, he gave up his beautiful wife, his newborn son, and even his loving father and foster mother, and entered the life of an ascetic, living in the forest, devoted to meditation. This was his great dispassionate renunciation (*Mahā Abhinikkhamana*).

The reason for his great renunciation (*Mahā*

*Abhinikkhamana*) was his recognition of the realities of life: birth, old age, disease, and death, through the four pre-cognitions: an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and a renunciate. Then the Harmonious Perspective dawned upon him. He began to realize that every living being on earth is subject to aging, decay, and death. Though most people take it for granted and attempt to forget it by immersing themselves in sensual pleasures, there was one person who avoiding this escape into fantasy set out to tackle the problem by eradicating the common urge for pleasure. The Bodhisatta realized that this was the right path to follow. This understanding of the realities of life through human intelligence brought about a reorientation in his life. His mind was directed towards the only worthwhile goal in life, which was to stop being carried away by emotions and to begin to solve the problem of **mortality** for the sake of all beings.

He did not see death as the opposite of life, but as a part of life. He saw that birth and death are only the two ends of the same stick of life. Life is not a static existence, but a dynamic process of activity starting at birth and ending at death, depending on conditions, similar to a flame. When the flame is extinguished, if you ask, “where did the flame go?” The answer is obvious, “it has not gone anywhere. It has only disappeared.” Similarly, there is no rebirth to one who has awakened from the dream of existence.

The Buddha saw that the normal human being selfishly runs after things that are subject to decay, disease, and death. They also become attached to these things and personalize them, and are reluctant to let go of them. This leads not only to much suffering, but also to much crime, wars, terrorism and all disasters.

He also realized that those who renounce the worldly

pursuits and stop going after things that are subject to aging, disease, and death are doing the right thing. Therefore, he thought: “I will do the same and also find the solution to the problem of existence for the sake of all beings.”

It was this decision that ended in the “Great Renunciation” of the Buddha (*Mahā Abhinikkhamana*), which began a supernormal transformation within this special human being, through a natural psychological evolutionary process, where the human being was able to overcome all human weaknesses through the development of dispassion, compassion, happiness, tranquility, and insight, ending in a supernormal **paradigm shift**, from **existence** (*bhava*) to **experience** (*dhamma*), thus **Awakening** (*sambodhi*) from the **dream of existence** (*bhava nidra*) and “entering the reality of experience” (*bhava nirodha*), which is the ultimate freedom from all suffering.

His in-sight regarding the impersonality of all suffering beings, and their freedom through recognizing this fact, was the gospel he set out to preach to the world. He made an effort to free the whole world from suffering, by opening the secret behind suffering. Only a few could really benefit, while the great majority continued to suffer in their pursuit of pleasure.

## **Compassion**

Having seen that all beings are born with a self-centred struggle for existence, consciously or unconsciously, and that it is the human being that becomes aware of a notion of “self” that is responsible for all the suffering one creates within oneself as well as for others, he saw that this self-centered mind has to be broadened and made to think of the welfare of

all beings and so cultivate a broad mind called universal benevolence (*mettā*).

This universal benevolence when cultivated grows into universal compassion (*karunā*) where no distinction is made between oneself and others. Others become as important as one-self. This way the self-consciousness is lost and all suffering is lost with it, just as a river falling into the ocean loses its identity.

## **Happiness**

The Bodhisatta's disappearance of suffering resulted in the happiness of selflessness (*muditā*). This selfless happiness is not an emotional excitement but a state of complete tranquility of mind, which is focused within and quite undisturbed by the vicissitudes of life such as gain and loss, fame and ill-fame, praise and blame, or pleasure and pain.

## **Insight**

His mind became focused within (*upekkhā*), which made him become aware of the inner experience. *Upekkhā* means seeing what is within (*upa* = within; *ikkati* = seeing). This awareness of the inner experience made him recognize the constituents of the process of perception (*pancakkhanda*). This made him realize how this mental process of perception and conception creates the world as well as the self and thus create suffering. Suffering was not due to rebirth but to the notion of a "self" created by self-centred emotions. Self disappears only when the past, present and future are given up.

*Muñca pure munca pacchato*

*Majje muñca bhavissa pārāgū*

*Sabbattha vimuttamānaso*

*Na puna jātijaram upehisi.*

*-Dhammapada 348*

Let go of the past, let go of the future  
Let go of the present, give up all being  
The mind released from all existence  
Will never be born nor die again.

The Buddha's great compassion (*karunā*) broadened his mind to the extent that he did not see a distinction between himself and others and so lost his self-consciousness, which resulted in freedom from all suffering ending in the happiness of selflessness (*muditā*). This selfless happiness was a calm, peaceful, restful state of mind that was never disturbed by the changing vicissitudes of life (*upekkhā*). This was why the mind of the Buddha always remained dispassionate, compassionate, happy, tranquil, and wise. He also encouraged others to do the same and free themselves from suffering. The past doesn't exist. The future doesn't exist. The present is becoming the past every fraction of a second. Does it exist? If you do not exist can you die or be reborn?

## **Reflecting on the *Dhamma***

These attributes comprise the essence of the Buddha, which is **THE DHAMMA**. The Buddha is Dhamma in **concrete** form, while *Dhamma* is Buddha in **abstract** form. This was why the Buddha said, "One who sees me sees the Dhamma, and one who sees the Dhamma sees me".

*Dhamma* can also be seen as the essence of spirituality, or the essence of Divinity or God, which is considered to

be LOVE. The Buddha called this essence the Divine Dwelling (*brahma vihāra*), which was described in the form of a Fourfold Experience (*mettā, karunā, muditā, and upekkhā*). They are: Universal Benevolence (*mettā*), Universal Compassion (*karunā*), Selfless Happiness, derived from freedom from self-centered emotions (*muditā*), Introspective tranquility which is undisturbed by the changing vicissitudes of life (*upekkhā*).

Therefore, when reflecting on the *Dhamma*, one should reflect on these same attributes of the Buddha, but in abstract form: Dispassion (*virāga*), Compassion (*mettā, karunā*), Selfless Happiness (*muditā*), Tranquility (*samādhi*), and In+sight (*paññā*). By understanding the meaning of these attributes, one begins to appreciate them and cultivate them. Understanding the *Dhamma* is important for the practice, because it is the extraordinary technique of purifying the mind. *Dhamma* includes the means (*magga*) to Nirvāna as well as the end (*phala*), which represent the benefits gained from the practice.

For an intelligent person the *Dhamma* becomes a map to find the way to Nirvāna. This *Dhamma* is the Harmonious Perspective. Without the *Dhamma* one cannot reach the goal. We cannot depend on teachers blindly, because they may lead us in the wrong direction. It is only by understanding the road properly ourselves that we can reach the goal. Treading the spiritual path is a matter of intelligence and strength of mind. This is why the Buddha said, “I do not teach the *Dhamma* like showing the way to a blind man who has to trust me blindly and follow me, but I am like a surgeon who operates on the eye and makes the blind man see for himself. Then he has to have confidence only in himself and not in me”. The more we follow the way, the more we begin to understand the way. The more we understand the way the more we begin to follow the way correctly and so reach

the goal. Knowledge of the benefits of the practice encourages one to practice.

## **Reflecting on the *Sangha***

The Dhamma was what the Buddha taught His followers to practice. **THE SANGHA**, being the community of followers, they individually possess these qualities to different degrees. Each individual will keep on practicing till each individual reaches the state of perfection, in this life itself or in another life to come. When we think of the *Sangha*, we think of these same qualities generally present in the Sangha. We do not think of individuals but we think of the community as a whole. We understand that there are members of the Sangha who had reached the highest level of perfection and those who are on the way. We also know that there are those who are at our own level. Sometimes we are aware of some who are even below our level, just as when standing on an escalator we can see people at the top, those at the bottom, and those standing midway. When we think of the Sangha we see people at different levels. We don't blame or condemn a person at the lower level for being at that level because they are on the way to Nirvāna. We only get confidence, "If that person can reach the higher level someday, I can also reach the higher level someday". This gives us inspiration and courage to practice. When we consider how even those at the lowest levels will someday reach the highest, we are inspired to practice. Reflecting on the Sangha we reflect on the same attributes. We are encouraged by associating with the Sangha.



## Reflecting on Oneself

We can cultivate these same qualities **WITHIN US**. We can examine ourselves to discover to what extent we possess these qualities within us, and also to what extent these qualities are absent in us. This tells us how much we need to practice in order to reach perfection. This knowledge inspires and encourages us. When we reflect on the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha we are inspired to cultivate these qualities to perfection within us. When we reflect on ourselves we see ourselves too standing on the escalator but moving upwards little by little. Even if the escalator is slow we are still moving. We are progressing. Our speed depends on our level of enthusiasm.

## Chapter VI

### Stage II: Cultivation of Good Thoughts

After reflecting on the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha, and even on oneself, and having got the inspiration to practice, one then begins to practice cultivating these qualities within oneself by reflecting on:

AWARENESS OF THE REALITIES OF LIFE	Reflecting on the <b>instability, insecurity &amp; impersonality</b> of all conditioned phenomena.
DISPASSION	Reflection on the danger, futility, and mental confusion connected with the pursuit of sensual pleasure.
COMPASSION	Selfless interest in the welfare of all beings. Here, we are not thinking only about ourselves but about all beings without exception.
HAPPINESS	Experiencing the happiness of freedom from selfishness
TRANQUILITY	Stillness of mind derived from lack of emotional disturbances.
INSIGHT	Reflecting on the five constituents of personality. Reflecting on birth, aging and death. E.g., the babies that were born are not the young men and women who get married. The old men and women that die are not the young men and women that got married? Do we really exist?